

Title: A Cross-Centered Message

Text: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

Theme: The Cross is central to the message of the church

Series: 1 Corinthians pt.4 (The Centrality of the Cross – pt.1)

Prop Stmnt. Every thing that we do as a church (and as believers) is profoundly affected by what happened on the cross.

When you are traveling eastbound on I-696 you eventually come to I-94 where you have to make a decision. Are you going to take I-94 toward Port Huron or are you going to take it toward Detroit? At that point the road divides and you have to choose. You cannot be ambivalent or neutral because at that point on the road you cannot travel toward Port Huron and toward Detroit at the same time.

The message of the cross is the defining and the dividing point in life. The message of the cross separates those who are on their way to ruin and those who are on their way to salvation. And by the way, there are many who are on their way to ruin who have plenty of religion, but do not truly understand the real message of the cross. What is the message of the cross? It is the gospel. It is the truth that you are a sinner and that you deserve the judgment of God and that you do not deserve the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God. However, because God is not only holy, but is also rich in mercy, God sent His own Son to this world to live a perfect life in your place so that He could die on the cross as your substitute, thereby taking upon Himself all of the punishment that your sin deserved. What is left for you to do? Believe Him! Trust Him! Put the weight of your soul upon Christ and Christ alone. Do not trust in yourself, in your religious activities or ceremonies for your forgiveness, but trust in Christ alone. We are saved from sin by the grace of God alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. But that message is offensive to many. That message is foolishness to many. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Let me explain those two phrases because they are present participles that are speaking about something that is taking place right now, but has future implications.

There are three aspects of salvation:

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| 1. Justification | Saved from Sin's Penalty (point in time) |
| 2. Sanctification | Being Saved from Sin's Power (process)
- being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ |
| 3. Glorification | Will Be Saved from Sin's Presence (point in time – future) |

The book of 1st Corinthians deals a lot with issues of sanctification. Sanctification is living out the implications of justification. If you do not fully understand what it means to become a genuine Christian, you will never understand what it means to live like a Christian. The message of the cross that saves us from sin's penalty is the same message that helps us grow as followers of Christ. The message that reconciles our relationship to God is the message that helps us live in reconciliation with each other. The vertical impacts the horizontal. That is why Paul is jumping all over this problem in the church at Corinth. These people, who had claimed to be followers of Christ, were embracing the

same attitudes and actions of their world. The church is called to the world. But, if our lives do not match our message, then our message is lost. So, when our lives get out of order, and at times, they do, then we have to go back to the message and realign ourselves with it. That is why we have to preach the gospel to ourselves, because our world and our own hearts are preaching a different sermon.

We began to look at the major problem of division that was affecting this church (vs. 10-17). Division was the surface expression of the issue of the heart. Paul is not content to simply say, "Hey class, that's a bad thing you are doing, cut it out!" He is going after the heart, or what is the motives that is driving this divisive spirit. What is it? They were reflecting the thinking of the world. What are some of the rules of our world?

He who dies with the most toys wins.

He who has money, health and power is happy.

She who looks young and proportionate is happy.

Living at the top is the ultimate satisfaction.

If I have a boyfriend, I am worth something.

If I have a car, I have value.

If I am strong, gifted, wanted, popular, envied, respected, noticed, known, then I am important.

Where is God in this picture? Well, the truth is, many people think that it is God's job to help them get to that level. Many people want a version of Christianity that helps them achieve what we have termed the "American Dream." God is not a means to an end. He is the beginning and the end. He is a jealous God and will not settle for 2nd place or as the ladder that helps you climb and claw your way to your self-centered place.

But why did Paul write this letter? Was he trying to take on the world's way of thinking and confront it? Not really! Who was he writing too? He was writing to the believers at Corinth who had embraced the world's thinking. They were applying the standards of the world to the ministry of the church, and the result was a disaster because the essential message of the church does not make any sense to the people of this world.

This passage is a powerful text on helping us understand what our view on the world is supposed to be. In verse 18, it is as if Paul takes the cross and sets it down right in the middle of the church, which splits the confusion and forces a clarity upon them. This text reveals things for what they really are. There is something to be said for image, or for labeling. It seems that whoever defines a word or frames an argument first is the one who has the clear advantage in winning the debate. Our problem is our own hearts are constantly framing the argument by telling us lies. This passage frames the argument with the truth – and here it is. The cross reveals those who are on their way to destruction and ruin and the cross reveals those who are on their way salvation and life. To those who are heading for destruction, the message of the cross is nonsense. But to those who are on their way to salvation and life, the message of the cross is the power of God. This Sunday and next we are looking at verses 18-25. Verse 18 and verse 25 serve as

bookends on this issue, framing this important matter for us to have a proper understanding.

So, here is the big idea of this sermon. Everything that we do as a church and everything that you do as a follower of Christ is profoundly affected by what happened at the cross. The message of the cross not only reveals the contrast of destinies that exists between the two groups, but it also reveals the contrast of values. This text is all about sanctification. This text is all about the “already vs. not yet” stuff that we talked about 2 weeks ago. Already, they were justified, but not yet were they glorified. Already you are a child of God, but not yet do you consistently live like it. If you are happy – tell your face! If you are a child of God – tell your values. Your values need to catch up to your position in Christ. In this passage Paul is exposing the values of the world for what they really are. The thinking of the world disguises itself as wisdom. The truth is, the world’s wisdom is an imposter, because it really is folly.

1. **Man’s “Wisdom” is Folly.** (19-22)

A. **Man’s Wisdom is Eloquent but Empty** (17, 19)

Verse 17 is really a transition statement from dealing with the surface issue to the heart issue. Back in that verse Paul makes it clear that when he preaches the gospel, he does not depend upon his eloquent skills (even though eloquence is always a crowd-pleaser). Eloquence may sound lofty and educated, but fancy words are no substitute for genuine truth. In verse 19, Paul quotes from Isaiah 29.14, where God is exposing the faulty thinking of the people of Judah who were thinking that they could go through the motions of worshiping God, while they followed the values of the world. God makes it very clear that the “wisdom of the world” will be destroyed. What appears to be intelligence will be revealed as being unintelligent, because it does not work.

Dr. Stephen Meyer and Dr. Rick Sternberg found this out the hard way. Dr. Meyer is a research fellow at the Discovery Institute, holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge and wrote an article entitled, “The Origin of Biological Information” in which he argues that based on the fossil record “dozens of distinct animal body forms suddenly spring into existence” which completely discredits Darwinism which claims that it took millions of years for these animal body forms to evolve. In his article, Dr. Meyer demonstrates that today’s proponents of Darwinism cannot explain this. Here is where the unintelligence of the intelligent became so obvious. Dr. Meyer submitted his paper to a scientific journal that is affiliated with the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of Natural History. The editor, Dr. Sternberg, after submitting it to 3 peers for review, published the article last August (2004). That is when the wrath of the Darwinists descended upon Dr. Sternberg who was stripped from his position as editor, his supervisors at the Smithsonian took away his office, made him turn in his keys and cut him off from access to the collections which he needed for his own research. His own colleagues are now “shunning” him and refusing to even speak to him when they see him. Whatever happened to science being an unbiased, open collection, and observation of the facts? The bias is clear, any

information that points to an Intelligent Design (also known as Creator) must be labeled as unintelligent.¹

B. Man's Wisdom is Clever but Limited. (19)

Man's wisdom is clever in the sense that it attempts to leave God completely out of the picture. Even though the wisdom of the world may use forms of "God-talk" it does not really believe it because God is not really followed. For example, let's say that someone embezzled \$30,000 from the church by diverting the funds from the church's account to their personal account. How should this be handled? Those who are dealing with this situation who are driven by Man's Wisdom will focus on how this will affect the reputation of the church. Those who are dealing with this who are driven by God's Wisdom will focus on the importance of truth.

For example:

Discuss 2 approaches – one driven by how this will affect the reputation, and the other, what is right.

C. Man's Wisdom is Impressive but Weak. (20)

In verse 20, Paul sets forth a series of challenging questions. (read) The point is, God is exposing the wisdom of the world for what it is. It may be impressive to the world, but in reality it is weak. This age, while impressed with man's wisdom will give way to the new age, when man-centered wisdom will be completely overthrown by God's wisdom.

D. Man's Wisdom is Popular but Inconsistent. (22)

The Jews placed a great deal of emphasis upon signs. They were impressed with miracles and wonders. But, the miracles, signs and wonders that Jesus performed did not lead them to saving faith. Their thirst for signs and wonders only led them to desire more signs and wonders. They looked at Christ as a signs and wonders factory, not as the Lord Christ who was to rule their hearts, lives and world. Did the signs that Jesus and some of the apostles perform communicate a message? Yes! Was that message understood – not usually. That does not make the signs bad, it just shows the limit of them. While the Jews were impressed with the signs, they ignored the message that was behind them. The desire for signs was a disguise for unbelief. Instead of taking God at his Word, they demanded evidences, and kept demanding evidence. That is why a crucified Christ was a contradiction in terms for them. Their Messiah was to have all kinds of power, not die! The message of the cross was and still is offensive to the Jews because of that. By the way, that is the danger of building your theology on the basis of signs and wonders, for it can easily lead to distracting you from the real essence of the faith. A person who thinks that signs and wonders will bring people to faith is creating a very difficult paradigm for the person who comes to faith like that, is going to think that signs and wonders is how we grow. Remember, the church at Corinth was having some problems in this area. Paul

¹ Taken from World magazine Feb. 19. 2005, pg.26.

is exposing that their understanding of sanctification is faulty, which is why he is going back to the message of the cross. If you replace the message of the cross with the message of signs and wonders, you will not have salvation, you are actually appealing to man's way of thinking instead of relying upon God.

The Greeks (Paul uses the word as a synonym for Gentiles) were more impressed with knowledge. This knowledge was the esoteric, hidden, search for the mystery sort of stuff that supposedly was real impressive because only a select few knew it.

Please understand what Paul is doing in this verse. He is exposing the two ways in which the world's way of thinking is found. 1) It is found in religion that searches for signs apart from the real message of the cross and 2) It is found in an unreligious search for truth and knowledge that is completely separate from God.

How many times have we heard of the Virgin Mary appearing on a taco or a water tower, or on the ear of a prairie dog? Someone else has a dream and says, God has given me a vision or God revealed something to me. Then someone says they saw a statue crying or something like that, and people get all wigged out thinking that a miracle has taken place and run to the location and what? Does it teach them how their sins are forgiven? Does it teach how to get along with your spouse or raise your children, or resolve a conflict with your brother-in-law? What does it do? On the other hand you have people who hear those things and they think, those religious people are total idiots. I can't relate to that at all. If I have a problem, I am going to fix it my way. I am going to live like according to my rules. Ironically, Paul identifies both of those as being ways in which the world thinks. Both of those are popular, but they sure are inconsistent.

God offers a better way. But hold on, because God's way is considered to be foolishness by the world.

2. God's "Folly" is Wise.

A. God's Folly is Powerful. (18)

It is able to save

B. God's Folly is Unlimited. (21)

It saves all who believe.

C. God's Folly is Christ. (24)